

Illegal

METHAMPHETAMINE LABS

Fact Sheet

Division of Environmental Health
Office of Environmental Health & Safety



Methamphetamine, also known as “crank” or “speed”, is a potent central nervous system stimulant with the potential to cause drug dependence. Possession, manufacture, or distribution is unlawful in many countries, including the United States.

WHAT IS AN ILLEGAL LAB?

An illegal methamphetamine or crank lab is one which is set up to produce this illegal drug. There are several different techniques used to produce methamphetamine. All of the processes use a variety of chemicals including explosives, solvents, metals, salts, and corrosives. During the drug manufacturing process (cooking), additional compounds and by-products are produced. The fumes, vapors, and spillage associated with cooking can be toxic.

POSSIBLE HEALTH EFFECTS

The risk of injury from chemical exposure depends on the chemical itself, the concentration, the quantity, and the length and route of exposure. Chemicals may enter the body by being breathed, eaten, injected (by a contaminated needle or accidental skin prick), or absorbed by the skin.

ACUTE EXPOSURE: An acute chemical exposure is one that occurs over a relatively short period of time and may result in health effects.

An acute exposure to high levels of contaminants found in methamphetamine labs can cause shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, chemical irritation, and burns to the skin, eyes, mouth and nose, and in severe cases, death. Acute reactions of this nature could occur during or immediately after a drug bust, before the lab has been ventilated.

Less severe symptoms resulting from a less acute exposure cause headache, nausea, dizziness, and fatigue or lethargy. These symptoms have been known to occur in people who have entered a drug lab after the bust has been completed, but before the property has been adequately cleaned and ventilated. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

CORROSIVE EFFECTS: Inhalation or skin exposure may result in injury from corrosive substances present in a methamphetamine lab. Symptoms range from shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, to burns to the skin.

SOLVENTS: Exposure to solvents can irritate the skin, mucous membranes, respiratory tract, and cause central nervous system effects. They are also dangerous because of their fire and explosive properties.

CHRONIC EXPOSURE: Chronic exposure occurs over an extended period of time, such as weeks, months, or years. A chronic health effect is one that usually appears after a lengthy period of time, possibly years.

Not much is known about the chronic health effects from these labs. However, there is scientific evidence from animal and human toxicity studies that shows the chemicals used in the manufacture of this drug can cause a range of health effects. These include cancer, damage to the brain, liver and kidneys, birth defects, and reproductive problems, such as miscarriages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, because of the possible health effects associated with methamphetamine labs:

- No one should enter a place that has been used as an illegal methamphetamine drug lab without appropriate personal protective equipment unless the area has been ventilated and decontaminated.
- No one should rent, purchase, or otherwise occupy a house or dwelling which has been used as an illegal drug lab until the property has been decontaminated according to the best available technology. Washington State law requires notice on property title.

The decision to rent, purchase or otherwise occupy a house or dwelling which has been used as a drug lab should be made with the knowledge that no decontamination procedure can guarantee absolute safety for re-occupancy.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- If you suspect a dwelling or property may be an illegal lab, contact the local police, or sheriff's department.
- If you own property which has been used as an illegal lab and would like a list of chemicals confiscated during the bust, contact the law enforcement agency responsible for the bust, i.e., local police or sheriff, Washington State Patrol, Federal Drug Enforcement Administration.
- If you have questions about environmental contamination from an illegal lab, contact the Washington State Department of Ecology office listed in your phone book.
- If you have questions about possible health effects related to illegal labs, or would like a copy of cleanup guidelines, contact your local health department.
- If you have other questions about illegal drug labs, contact:

Office of Environmental Health
& Safety
PO Box 47825
Olympia, WA 98504-7825
Toll-free: 1-888-586-9427